minimum age at which a person can join the Army is 17.5 years. The maximum age limit for enrolment in the Army ranges from 21 to 34 years depending upon the category of trade. The upper age limit of 21 years is applicable to the Soldier (General Duty) category only. The main reasons for fixing the upper age limit of 21 years for the Soldier (General Duty) category are as under:-

(i) To maintain a younger age profile for better combat effectiveness of Soldier (General Duty) category, who constitute the cutting edge of the Army.

(ii) The minimum educational qualification for applying for this trade is 10th class/Matriculation, which is generally passed at the age of 16 to 17 years. To provide aspiring candidates with adequate opportunities for getting enrolled in the said trade after having passed 10th class/Matriculation, the maximum age has been fixed at 21 years.

(b) There is no proposal to increase the maximum age limit.

Bomb explosions in ordnance factory, Amravati, Maharashtra

190. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased state:

(a) whether more than 5000 bombs exploded in the ammunition depot in unit 9 of Ordnance Factory at Amravati in Maharashtra on the 31st of January, 2005;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the cause of the explosion;

(c) the number of persons killed/suffered injuries due to this explosion; and

(d) the measures taken to the check recurrence of such incidents?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI B.K. HANDIQUE): (a) An accidental fire had taken place in Building No. 273 of Unit No. 9 of Ordnance Factory, Chanda (OFCH), Maharashtra, on 31.1.2005. The exact numbers of bombs destroyed will be known after receipt of Board of Inquiry (BOI) Report.

(b) The cause of the explosion and other details would be known after receipt of the report of the Board of Inquiry.

(c) No person was killed. However one person sustained injury.

(d) The Board of Inquiry has been asked to suggest remedial measures to be taken to avoid recurrence of such incidents. Appropriate action would be taken on the basis of the Board of Inquiry report.

Steps to prevent air crashes

†191. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that every month one plane of Indian Air Force crashed during last four years;

(b) if so, the amount lost and the number of pilots killed in these plane crashes;

(c) whether these plane crashes occurred due to technical failure or due to human errors; and

(d) the details of steps taken by Government to prevent the air crashes?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) The details of the aircraft accidents, along with their cause, which took place during the last four years in the Indian Air Force (IAF) is given in the Statement (*See* below).

In these accidents, the IAF has lost 31 pilots and suffered a loss of Rs. 634.74 crores. In a few cases, the cost is yet to be finalised.

(d) The Indian Air Force continuously undertakes measures to enhance and upgrade flight safety. Steps to enhance the quality of training to improve the skill levels, ability to exercise sound judgement and situational awareness of pilots are being pursued. Constant interaction with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) of concerned countries are also maintained to overcome

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.